



# 2018 Disability Advisory Forum (DAF) Meeting Report

---

## Australian Communications Consumer Action Network

Wednesday, 7 March 2018, 11.00am – 3.00pm

**PRESENT:**

Dean Barton-Smith	ACCAN Board, Chair
Bruce Maguire	Vision Australia
Greg Killeen	Spinal Cord Injuries Australia
Steve Williamson	Deafness Forum of Australia
Dwayne Cranfield	National Ethnic Disability Alliance
Jan Ashford	Communications Rights Australia (dial in) 11:40am -1pm
Claire Telefson	AbleLink – Able Australia (dial in) 1-3pm

**INTERPRETERS:**

Natalie Kull  
Julie Judd (via skype)

**APOLOGIES:**

Ross Joyce	Australian Federation of Disability Organisations
Kyle Miers	Deaf Australia
Samantha French	People with Disability Australia
June Reimer	First People's Disability network

**ACCAN STAFF:**

Teresa Corbin, CEO  
Una Lawrence, Director of Policy  
Wayne Hawkins, Disability Policy Advisor  
Kelly Lindsay, Consumer Engagement and Membership Officer

The purpose of ACCAN's Disability Advisory Forum (DAF) is to identify the most important telecommunications consumer issues from the perspective of key representatives in the disability community, with a view to using this information to inform ACCAN's future disability policy priorities.

The following meeting report provides an overview of the main issues raised and discussed. DAF participants are welcome to use this document in reporting back to their organisations. This report will also be sent to invited representatives who were unable to attend.

## **1. ACCAN update**

ACCAN staff provided a brief outline of several major consumer issues and a summary of ACCAN's outcomes in the past 12 months.

- ACCAN has been granted a new contract since the last DAF – this contract extends ACCAN's activities until early 2022.
- Priority assistance – systemic improvements have been implemented
- Universal Service Guarantee (USG) to replace the Universal Services Obligation (USO); the aim is to underpin access to voice services. Telco Reform Bill legislative package was introduced in Federal Parliament; this will guarantee access to data networks capable of 25mbps download and 5 mbps upload speeds
- Tighter guidelines for broadband speeds in product advertising have been published by Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)
- ACCC broadband speed monitoring trial commenced, with first results out soon. This will provide consumers with information about provider speeds over nbn services.
- New consumer protection measures regulated by the Australian Communications Media Association (the ACMA) will commence mid-year. These will have significant impact and effect major change in the telco industry.
- TIO complaint numbers are up 40%; these complaints are not solely attributed to nbn rollout issues, they are across all areas and highlight that much work needs to be done to address consumer issues across the whole of the communications sector.

## **2. ACCAN draft policy priorities**

ACCAN staff gave a brief overview of our draft policy priorities for the current year, and invited DAF feedback. These are:

### *Improved consumer safeguards*

*We will advance protections needed for the delivery of essential communications services to consumers.*

### *Better communications for poorly served areas*

*We will work closely with communities for improvements in existing services and mobile network expansion, and for a smooth transition to NBN broadband.*

### *Empowering consumer decision making*

*We will support a competitive market by ensuring consumers are informed and have the tools they need to participate.*

### *Affordable communications*

*We will strive to eliminate affordability barriers for all consumers.*

### *Improved accessibility*

*We will work with our members for the removal of barriers to access to communications products and services for people with disability.*

*Privacy, security and online safety*

*We will work to maintain and protect consumer privacy, security, and online safety.*

Issues discussed were:

- There is a need for service supporting people with disability across all the priorities.
- Upselling is a huge issue for CALD consumers, especially those with disability. An example is a case of a Foxtel Platinum package sold to someone on a disability pension that cost more than his pension; another is an elderly relative with impaired cognitive functions who was sold 4 iPhones in 10 days by Telstra. Concerns at sales incentives were identified.
- It is important to remember the eligibility limits for NDIS; for those who are eligible, there are many serious concerns about people being incorrectly assessed, and instances of expert advice speech pathologists not being taken into account in some cases (speech pathology reports have not been acted on in approximately 15 cases).
- Advocacy is needed for consumers with disability dealing with their telcos. PWD find it hard to work though issues with customer service staff. Staff in offshore call centres have little understanding of access issues (e.g. what Braille or blindness is). Older people with hearing impairment find it hard to negotiate with accented customer service representatives.
- NBN and safety issues due to the loss of service in power blackouts. Mobiles are not an adequate alternative to a landline for older people.
- Increasing use of telehealth is welcomed, but it uses up considerable data. There is a need for assistance for people with health condition here.
- Cooling off periods in cases where there is found to be inadequate mobile reception to use the service fully. There are many cases where people are experiencing poor reception in urban areas.

ACCAN will work through the issues raised and incorporate these into our policy priorities and work plan.

### **3. ACCAN disability policy priorities 2017/2018**

The documents circulated prior to the meeting aimed to capture the issues ACCAN is currently working on in the disability area, and to identify the known priorities of our stakeholders. Attendees at the DAF had also been asked to come prepared with suggestions of areas for future policy priorities.

ACCAN staff provided a brief outline of the major work areas outlined in the issue papers, which are the disability policy priorities ACCAN is currently focusing on. These included;

#### **National Relay Service (NRS)**

A number of issues relating to the National Relay Service (NRS) were raised. These include the proposed funding cap of \$22 million per year for the life of the new contract (July 2018 onwards),

proposed compulsory registration for NRS users and the scaled-back outreach program for the service.

The Department of Communications had provided ACCAN with a letter to update the DAF on the Government's activities on the NRS. The letter indicated that the NRS contract tender documents were still being developed and the Department would provide public information when the request for tender was released.

ACCAN CEO noted that the Minister's office had given assurance that there would be no reduction in relay delivery in the interim before a new contract was implemented.

Issues discussed:

- Ongoing concerns about Outreach – can this service be better provided by disabled peoples' organisations?
- Perhaps a consortium of disabled peoples' organisations, as PWD trust their member organisations, and these are good networks to disseminate information
- Questions of efficacy of previous Outreach in training and awareness
- Ongoing need for increased support for people with speech impairment

Members thanked ACCAN for our continuing work on this issue and supported ACCAN's ongoing engagement with the Government and the community.

*Note:* since the DAF the NRS Outreach service has informed ACCAN that the current NRS contracts have been extended until 31 January 2019.

### **Audio Description on Australian Television**

ACCAN discussed our participation on the Government's Audio Description Working Group – along with a number of ACCAN member organisations including Blind Citizens Australia, Vision Australia and Media Access Australia. The Working Group report was delivered to the Minister at the end of December 2017. The Minister has stated that the report will be made public but has not announced when that will happen.

ACCAN also informed the DAF about meetings we have had with a number of politicians in February 2018 discussing this issue, including Minister Fifield's advisors, Shadow Minister Michelle Rowland's advisor, Labor Senator Carol Brown and Greens Senator Jordan Steel-John.

Issues discussed:

- How do we get other groups on board that would benefit from audio description, to support VA and BCA to develop partnerships with other groups who would benefit from audio description on television, for example, autism organisations.

The DAF participants agreed that we need to continue to lobby the Government to introduce AD on Australian television. A number of possible strategies were discussed.

*Note:* Since the DAF, ACCAN has continued to liaise with member organisations on this issue, including setting up a meeting with Big Access Media for late March or early April.

## **National Disability Telecommunications Service (NDTS)**

At the previous DAF the participants supported ACCAN to progress our proposal for a nationwide disability telecommunications service. The NDTS proposal is for a one-stop resource for information about mainstream and assistive communications products and services suitable for people with disability. A NDTS will also provide information and referrals for training, set-up, maintenance and ongoing support as well as information and referrals for equipment provision opportunities. A number of funding models were discussed at the previous DAF including the possibility of NDIA ILC funding. ACCAN has made 2 separate applications to NDIA ILC National Readiness grants rounds – the first was unsuccessful and the second round application grants have not as yet been announced.

Issues discussed:

- There was considerable discussion about the appropriateness of NDIA funding for a NDTS. There was a majority view that other funding opportunities, such as industry or government and industry partnership, would be more appropriate for a NDTS.
- It was noted that this type of service is increasingly necessary as population ages
- There is strong support for one-stop resource
- How does this fit with NRS outreach? Is there capacity to expand NRS outreach to include NDTS?
- Possibilities for campaign like activities
- Engaging the whole sector as partners
- Telcos need to be funding this as part of disability engagement strategy – PWD need telecommunications and are considerable market, particularly given NDIS funding packages
- There are opportunities for multi-agency government participation i.e. Job Access, Veterans Affairs, DSS, DoCA
- The NDTS proposal needs to be developed further – for example, a cost benefit analysis, a stronger evidence base, and identification of where is technical support coming from are needed.

ACCAN has agreed to review our strategy around the NDTS proposal and undertake more research to support the initiative as well as evaluate a broader campaign-like approach to getting this initiative developed. It was agreed at the DAF that this idea has a lot of merit and should be pursued.

## **Public procurement of accessible ICT**

This has been a policy priority for ACCAN and a number of our member organisations for a number of years. There was productive discussion about the progress to date and the ongoing need to push for all levels of government to adopt procurement policies for accessible ICT.

In December 2016 Australia adopted a Standard, *'Accessibility Requirements Suitable for Public Procurement of Accessible ICT Products and Services'*. In early 2018 the NSW Government incorporated this Australian Standard into the State's ICT procurement processes. ACCAN will continue to work with our members promote the Standard and encourage the adoption of procurement policies for accessible ICT at all levels of government.

ACCAN is keen to engage more closely with consumers in our work on disability and accessible communications, and would like to use the Disability Advisory Forum as a means of building stronger

networks in the community. Our work on accessible ICT devices and services will lead to greater opportunities for economic, social and community participation for people with disability.

We continue to engage with policy makers, regulators, industry and consumers to push for greater accessibility of all communications products and services. The ACCAN website has a disability portal at <http://accan.org.au/consumer-info/disability> that is a useful resource, and we welcome feedback and suggestions for improvement.

#### **4. Feedback from Forum participants**

ACCAN had requested that DAF participants provide information on how their members and members of their disability communities access information about telecommunications equipment and services. This information will be useful in ACCAN's engagement with industry to promote greater availability of appropriate information about both mainstream and assistive communications products suitable for people with disability. This information will also support ACCAN's efforts to improve consumer outcomes in the current Telecommunications Consumer Protection Code (TCP) review.

Issues discussed:

- All industry information channels need to include information about accessible products and services
- Everything from print resources to social media is used by PWD
- PWD are a broad church, similar to the rest of population
- ACL requires that providers make information about products available to consumers so consumers know what they buy is fit for purpose
- Feeding information to DPOs is a necessary part of information socialisation. PWD trust the organisations they join
- Outreach to sector is a missing link
- There is a large percentage of older PWD due to age-related disability and impairment (for example, 75% of people with low vision are over 65). Many elderly with impairment do not identify as disabled
- Low levels of digital inclusion in older PWD means that they will rely on more traditional channels for information – printed resources, family, friends, colleague's word-of-mouth etc.
- Specific issues with digital verification processes for people with vision impairment
- Difficulties with Apps for many PWD, as people without smartphones or who are non-technical are excluded.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The feedback and suggestions made at the Disability Advisory Forum will be used to inform ACCAN's future policy priorities, policy focus, operations plan and research activity plan. These will be circulated to members of the Forum when finalised.

ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin, thanked the DAF participants for their time and valuable contributions.